

The Henry Gun Factory
Bolton, Near Belfast, Pennsylvania

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Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Pennsylvania

Historic American Buildings Survey
Ralph W. Lear, District Officer
311-312 Dime Bank Bldg., Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

THE HENRY GUN FACTORY
Boulton, near Belfast, Northampton County, Pennsylvania.

Present Custodian

Dr. T.H.A. Stites, of Boulton.

Date of Erection

Built 1812,

Builder

William Henry, Jr.

Present Condition

Very poor.

Number of Stories

Two and one-half.

Materials of Construction

First floor, stone, second floor, wood siding
over stone and brick, stiffened by wood framing.
Gable roof, covered with slate.

THE HENRY GUN FACTORY

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The Henry Gun Factory, located at Boulton, Pennsylvania, although not operating, is still standing. In more recent years, it has been quite neglected, and is now in great need of repair. It was last used for the manufacturing of arms, about 1893.

The first owner of the Henry Gun Factory was William Henry, who also owned a factory for the manufacture of arms at Lancaster, Pennsylvania. His father was of Scotch Irish descent. William was sent at the early age of fifteen to Lancaster in 1744, as an apprentice to a Lancaster gunsmith, named Matthew Roesser. Henry's mechanical skill made him an ideal apprentice and in 1750, engaged in making fire arms on his own account. He formed a partnership with a wealthy man, named Joseph Simon. He was appointed armorer to General Braddock's expedition in the French and Indian War. After the defeat of General Braddock, returned to Lancaster and resumed his trade. Mr. Henry was an inventive genius. William H. Gordon, in his biography of Henry states that Henry is the inventor of the first steam boat, rather than Fulton or Fitch. Mr. Gordon asserts that Henry built two steam boats and tried them out on the Conestoga River, and proved their practicability.

Another product of the William Henry Gun Factory of Lancaster, developed and invented by him, was the screw augur, which he invented in 1771. An account of this was published in Rees's Encyclopaedia, written by John Joseph Henry, which follows:

"The invention occurred in 1771,***"at that period, and for many years in company with a partner, was kept a large iron mongery store, by a person of considerable ingenuity and their leisure moments were usually consumed at their work bench or in the store.*** he frequently heard the inventor, among his friends expatiate on the idea of

an augur.*** the idea was eccentric and a bold one to promulgate. *** In the summer of 1771, I saw a screw augur for the first time in the hands of my father. It was a leaden one and he was in the act of boring a turnip, I will remember his disapprobation at the time over the manner of cutters breaking the chips of the turnip *** As the inventor, at the time spoken of, was not by profession, a mechanic, the late Samuel Boyd of Lancaster, who so sedulously attended to the augur, was engaged for that purpose, but relinquished it to Henry Houch of Lititz, by trade, a carpenter.*** George Switzbohrer who now employed this person, being extremely apt in the use of iron, succeeded in perfecting the augur in 1772."

Among the children of William Henry Jr., was John Joseph Henry, the oldest son, who was associated with his father in business, and later William Henry 3rd, who also was associated with his father. The oldest son was sent to manage a branch in Philadelphia. William Henry Jr., first located at Christian Springs, but in 1780, possibly through Moravian influence, came to Nazareth. He entered into contracts with the State and the United States Government for the manufacture of arms. In 1809, Henry built a forge about half way between Schoeneck and the present location of the Gun Factory where he continued his work, but for better water facilities and power, he moved to his present location.

In the year, 1810, the Henry firm secured a contract for the manufacture of approximately 10,000 standard arms for the United States Government. The plant facilities were insufficient for the handling of a contract of this size. The story of the old factory of Boulton is found in a memo, written by William Henry, 3rd, in July, 1872. It follows:

"In the year, 1810, my father, then residing in the village of Nazareth, proposed erecting works on the Bushkill Creek, three miles N.W. from Nazareth, for the purpose of making musket barrels and other parts of a musket, and after contracting with Secretary Bustes of the government of the United States, to further this idea. He sent me to practically acquire a further acquaintance of the gun making business to my brother, Joseph, who then had some fifty or more workhands, was located at the N.W. corner of Noble and 3rd Streets (Philadelphia) engaged in the manufacture of rifles and muskets. There I remained for two years, returning to my fathers and on the 8 April, 1812, commenced felling lumber for the new factory. In 1872^{it was} in the occupancy of Mr. James Henry, my brother Joseph's only son. It required

some six months to put it up, and to complete it for the houses and other buildings required, six more months were consumed. My father being otherwise occupied, soon left this establishment to my care and Superintendence.

He, Joseph and self were charged some \$10,000.00 for what my father expended".

Parts of some other memos are here detailed: " In the spring of 1811. I had the offer of Superintending a manufactory in the rear of what once was the Conmipsoners halls, this street near Green, east side, to put up and finish all condemned parts of muskets and swords, condemned by the United States Inspector of Arms, that could be made available for Muskets for the South American trade. From the establishment of M. Abraham Nippes, and that of my brother Joseph, who, at the time was in partnership with our father, were contractors with the U.S. Government to furnish arms, and the Ordnance department at Washington, at the time under the supervision of Col. Bonfort.

At the manufactory, I superintended (then only 17 year age) I employed about 30 to 35 workmen in the grinding and polishing. I contracted to the others. It was chiefly done at Ten Mile Creek Factory above Schuylkill falls, near the river, many of my sales were made to the agents of the South American revolutionists, among them was a brother of the then celebrated General Bolivar. In 1812, my brother Joseph and myself entered into a new contract with the Secretary of War, William Buxtes for the supply of 10,000 muskets, according to a standard 'Charleville' French musket, in the year 1812, early in April, with the view of erecting additions where the arms could be more advantageously made, I removed and commenced erecting "Boulton Works" in Bushkill Twp., 3 miles N.E. from Nazareth for the manufacture. After surmounting numberless difficulties in training the necessary working men, musket barrels, rifle bar, Pistols and Cavalry arms, sword belts files, musket, rifle locks, and employed mostly in all the branches about 80 workmen. Not long after commencing the manufacture of muskets, M.T. Wickham, the Inspector, demanded and obtained from us, an article so far superior to the Pattern, that I thought best to memorialize Congress on this proceeding for a time. We were delayed and these procrastinations deferred our business, and consequently we could not complete the contract within the stipulated time which the Sec'y of War, refused to extend, except indeed, we should turn traitors

to our political preferences, and as hinted at by Gen'l Rob't Brown, to a member of Congress from Northampton County Pa., to my brother Joseph and myself at the time. In the city of Washington, (Jan. 7, 1813) spurned the insulting condition and were of course, obliged to repay \$10,000.00 advanced funds to the Ordnance department, and sold our contract to M.E. Wickham, a political favorite of the government at this time for \$1000.00. We finally, after several years of delay recovered two dollars additional compensation on six thousand, five hundred muskets delivered, and were released from all further responsibility. M.E. Wickham completed the contract and utterly ruined in purse and mind soon afterward died, - Now 1816, the ruinous conditions of monetary concerns then prevalent, obliged us to struggle through years of great difficulty at Boulton. We made rifle barrels, cutting brands. In 1822, I sold my interest in this (Boulton) works to my brother Joseph for about half its value (\$8350.00)"

When John Joseph took over the factory, he took into partnership, his son, James Henry, to continue the business after the death of his father in 1836, who conducted the fortunes of the Boulton Gun Factory, through the Civil War.

All the work in the Gun Factory was done by hand, whatever little machinery that was employed, was made by Mr. Henry, himself. The Gun stocks were all sawed off by hand and were made from beech, maple and walnut. The guns when finished, were put on the New York markets. The industry soon gained a great deal of prominence. When the industry was at its height, about one hundred men were employed. Many of these were known as fillers and lived along the road leading from Cherry Hill to Jacobsburg, still known as Fildertown, because of the trade followed by the heads of the family.

While for nearly a century, Boulton was the seat of an arms factory, peace dwelt in the little valley, for the character of the proprietors was so high that it was reflected in the entire countryside. The relationship of the proprietor and his employees was founded upon the English Patriarchal system, than upon the American system of the present day; many of the workmen owned their own small lands, bought

from Henry, to whom they looked, as lord of the manor. Strikers were unknown and disagreements were amicably settled. There were no drastic rules as to hours and other labor rights, so prominent today. The workmen usually took their work to their own homes, and when it was completed returned it to the factory, where it was assembled.

In 1862, an order of one thousand was filled for the government. The war ended and then came a great demand for sporting rifles; then came the age of the Light Horse Pistol and the Lamb's Leg, these had but a short duration, and in 1873, a single barrel Breech Loader was manufactured and large orders were filled. In 1880, a revival of the Luzzle Loading rifle came. The cheaper Breech Loader supplanted this, and made the business dwindle. Thus, the business was carried on under the name of James Henry, and upon the death of James Henry, as James Henry & Son, (Granville) until 1893 or thereabouts when it was abandoned.

One of the principal outlets of the Henry Gun Factory, was the American Fur Company, who had almost a monopoly on it. John Jacob Astor was its president.

Soon after the discontinuance of the gun business, Granville's brother, Edward T. Henry, used the factory building for the manufacture of cigar boxes, this continued for a short time. He later, installed machinery for the cleaning and repairing of cloth bags, at that time, used for shipment of cement. A side line of which was the picking apart of such bags, as could not be repaired. This material was worked into cotton felt used in the manufacture of mattresses. This however, was entirely discontinued by the passing of a law by the Pennsylvania Legislature, forbidding the employment of used materials.

The building is of heavy mill type construction, the first floor having heavy exterior stone walls. The second floor consists of wood studs covered with wood siding. Between the wood studs is a four inch brick wall. The roof is covered with slate. Floor construction consists of heavy timbers, with wood boards laid over same. The original building was T. shaped, but later, the wing extending out toward the highway, was removed, so at present, the building is in the form of a rectangle and is in very poor condition.

In back of the building was a large dam which furnished water power to run the large water wheels in the factory.

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The wheels were situated approximately in the center of the building.

Dr. T.H.A. Stites, of Bolton, a descendent of William Henry, is now the owner and custodian of the building. He has many records and letters, written by the members of the Henry family as well as some of the guns, which were made in the various branches of the Henry Gun Factory.

Colonel Thomas H. Atherton, also a descendant of William Henry, has many guns which were made at the Bolton works. Also, in his possession are portraits done in oils, of William Henry and his wife.

The old factory is now deserted and stands on the banks of the Bushkill, denuded of all, save its historic memories.

Historic material obtained from: Dr. T.H.A. Stites of Bolton, who furnished letters and memos written by William Henry 3rd. Colonel T.H. Atherton, who furnished material from a paper, published in Bethlehem, Pa in 1925, entitled "1741---- Historical----Bethlehem, Pa.-----Industrial-----1925"; also, a paper written by Rev. J.A. Klick for the Northampton and Lehigh Historical Society at Nazareth, on the Boulton Gun Works.

Author..

Approved..

Date.....

Bethlehem, Pa. 10/1/36
Ralph W. ...
October 1, 1936

Rev. Feb. 2 '37 T.H.W.